

# Byzantine Missions

## *Meaning, Nature, and Extent*

DUMBARTON OAKS SYMPOSIUM, 29–30 APRIL 2022

SERGEY IVANOV and ANDREA STERK, Symposiarchs

Though closely connected with the study of conversion and Christianization in the premodern era, the history of Christian missions has received little attention in recent scholarship. The recipients of Christian faith—individuals, nations, or social groups—and the processes of integrating the new religion have continued to attract analysis, but the agents of religious transformation have been relatively understudied, especially beyond the boundaries of medieval western Europe.

How did Byzantium missionize “barbarians”? To what extent did the motives, goals, or methods of missionaries themselves correspond with the vision of Byzantine rulers who may have sponsored them? This symposium examined the meaning of religious mission in Byzantium and how this concept shifted over time under changing political circumstances. Speakers considered literary works, linguistic evidence, and archaeological traces from Lithuania in the north to Nubia

in the south, from Croatia in the west to the Golden Horde in the east. They examined how imperial policy built on or coincided with the unofficial missionary activity of monks, merchants, exiles, refugees, and captives. Concurrent with imperial efforts, Miaphysite and East Syrian churches, deemed heretical by the Orthodox Byzantines, conducted their own missionary endeavors reaching as far as Central Asia and China. What do the mission strategies of sibling Christianities suggest about underlying theological ideals, and what light might these comparisons shed on the nature of Byzantine missions?

The symposium aimed to illuminate the inner motives that characterized Byzantine missions, the changing incentives that inspired them, and the nature of their missionary activity; and ultimately to better understand how the Byzantines perceived the universal claims of their empire and their church. At the same time, the organizers threw light on the broader religious dynamics of the medieval world.

FRIDAY, 29 APRIL

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome: Thomas B. F. Cummins and  
Nikos D. Kontogiannis

### RE-THINKING “MISSION” IN BYZANTIUM

Chair: John Duffy  
*Missions, Emissions, and Toolkits: Byzantium’s  
Creative Untidiness*  
Jonathan Shepard, University of Oxford

*Byzantine Missionaries, Foreign Rulers, and  
Conversion to Christianity: Historical Events and  
Byzantine Reconstructions*  
Alexander Angelov, William & Mary

*Building, Teaching, Caring for the Poor: Byzantine  
Missions in Theory and Practice from John  
Chrysostom to Clement of Ohrid*  
Andrea Sterk, University of Minnesota

#### COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO MISSION

Chair: Ioli Kalavrezou

*Interpreting Accounts of Non-Nicene Mission:  
Ecclesiastical Historians on Missionary Bishops*

Anna Lankina, University of Florida

*Mission, Conversion, and Myth in Syriac Christian  
Memory*

Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, Marquette  
University

*The Road to Bulayiq: Mission and Translation in the  
Church of the East*

Joel Thomas Walker, University of Washington

*Remembering Robert Thomson*

Tim Greenwood, University of St Andrews  
Robin Darling Young, Catholic University of  
America

#### SATURDAY, 30 APRIL

#### GEOGRAPHY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF MISSION: TEXTUAL AND MATERIAL EVIDENCE

Chairs: Dimiter Angelov and Elizabeth Bolman

*Remembering Saint Gregory: Armenian Tradition and  
Byzantine Mission*

Tim Greenwood, University of St Andrews

*Sixth-Century Byzantine Missions to Nubia in Context*

Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, University of Ottawa

*Byzantine Mission on the Black Sea and in the  
Caucasus: New Data*

Andrey Vinogradov, National Research University–  
Higher School of Economics, Moscow

*Byzantine Missions in the Western and Central  
Balkans in the Light of Archaeological Findings*

Maja Petrinec, University of Zagreb

#### ENCOUNTERING OTHER RELIGIONS

Chair: Claudia Rapp

*From Byzantium to China: Syriac Christian Missions  
along the Silk Road*

Li Tang, University of Salzburg, Austria

*“Peace be upon whoever follows the guidance”: Christian  
and Muslim “Mission” in the Late Medieval Middle  
East*

Thomas A. Carlson, Oklahoma State University

#### CONCLUSION

Chair: George Demacopoulos

*Byzantine Missions and the Mission of Byzantium*

Sergey Ivanov, National Research University–  
Higher School of Economics, Moscow